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ABSTRACT

A study surveyed 4,400 students enrolled in 24 of the 26 private career schools who were members of the Minnesota Association of Private Postsecondary Schools in January 1990. A questionnaire gathered demographic data on students, information on how they came to choose the school and program, and students' assessment of the quality of the training and services they received. Analysis of the data revealed that a majority of students were women, white, beyond the typical college-going age, single, and high school graduates. Students rejected other types of institutions because they thought the quality of programs offered was poor, the program was too long, or the institution did not offer a program in a field of interest. The primary reason students chose a particular school was its reputation for job placement. Students indicated they would recommend the school to a friend. Over 70 percent were satisfied with admissions, their programs, facility and equipment, and job placement assistance. Few student characteristics were significantly associated with satisfaction with school. Differences among students enrolled in schools accredited by the three major accrediting bodies--National Association of Trade and Technical Schools, Association of Independent Colleges and Schools, and National Accrediting Commission of Cosmetology Arts and Sciences--were identified. (10 references) (YLB)

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The Role and Quality of Proprietary Schools: Minnesota Students' Perspectives

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THE PROBLEM

In recent years private career schools, also known as proprietary schools, have been the subject of a stream of negative publicity in the media. Several major chains have gone bankrupt stranding many students who did not complete their programs with large guaranteed student loans. Other schools have been accused of enrolling disadvantaged students who could not benefit from the instruction offered (Pelavin Associates, 1988). Despite all the media attention private career schools generally are excluded from national studies of higher education, yet throughout the 1980's they made up the most rapidly growing sector of higher education and consume an increasing share of federal and state student aid budgets.

Research on the sector since the 1970's has been limited to analysis of the few private career school students in national data bases such as "High School and Beyond" (Sango-Jordon, 1989) or institutional level surveys such as (Moore and Smith, 1989). There have been almost no attempts to collect data directly from students about why they choose a private career school, or how they evaluated the experience.

This study presents the results of a survey of 4,400 students enrolled in 24 private career schools in Minnesota in January 1990. The analysis attempts answer the following research questions:

What are the characteristics of students who choose to a private career school?

How do private career schools fit into the students experience with post-secondary education? What proportion of students come directly out of high school and what proportion attend an other institution first?

Why do student choose a private career school? Why don't they choose other alternatives such as community colleges, public post-secondary vocational institutions, or traditional four year institutions?

How do student rate the quality of their experience in private career schools?

Are their difference between students enrolled in schools accredited by the three major accrediting bodies: National Association of Trade and Technical

Schools (NATTS), Association of Independent Colleges and Schools (AICS), and the National Accrediting Commission of Cosmetology Arts and Sciences (NACCAS)?
What characteristics are associated with student satisfaction?

Minnesota's Regulatory Environment

Prior to the recent wave of negative publicity about private career schools most state took a "hands off" approach to regulating accredited private career schools. This was not the case in Minnesota. Minnesota has a long tradition of strictly regulating and overseeing its 26 accredited schools, and this may limit the generalizability of this study findings to other states.

This regulation, anchored in Chapter 141 of the Minnesota Statues, is known as the Private Business, Trade and Correspondence School Act, going back to 1969. Minnesota's proprietary schools are bound by state regulation which, in the words of the State Association's Executive Director is "tight, but fair and equitable, intended to keep the bad apples out." Consequently, Minnesota's proprietary schools enjoy full recognition and acceptance by the other sectors of post secondary education and are integrated as one of the state's six systems under the oversight of the Minnesota Higher Education Coordinating Board (MHECB). (The Board has already begun to implement a state-wide consumer information system on all programs, public and private, that lead to a sub-baccalaureate degree or diploma. The consumer information system, which will eventually include degree and non-degree granting programs alike, will serve as a National model in response to President Bush's Students-Right-To-Know Act.)

Minnesota's proprietary schools are typically small (average 250 students with many schools having less than 100 students), and are generally stable, family run businesses, often handed over from father to son, with long-standing ties to local businesses, high schools and the community at large. Modest population growth and stable demographic characteristics result in only few schools branching; the predominant mode of expansion is the acquisition of existing schools.

Minnesota law regulates proprietary schools in many of its business aspects, providing consumer protection and uniformity in school operations:

- All schools operating in Minnesota, including satellite schools owned by non-Minnesota companies, must be registered with the Minnesota Higher Education Coordinating Board and licensed by the Commissioner of Education. School licenses are renewable annually.

- Applicant schools must show evidence of compliance with certain minimum financial and operating standards, including content and format of advertising material and school brochures or catalogs.

- School names may not include the names "college", or "university", unless entitled by the Commissioner.

- Schools must file a continuous corporate surety bond conditioned upon the faithful performance of all contracts and agreements with the students.

- Applicant schools must submit school policies and regulations governing student conduct and progress, and must conform to the standard refund policy which allows for a continuous pro-rata refund of tuition up to 75% course completion.

- Schools must disclose, to the Commissioner and any prospective student, course completion job placement data.

- Solicitors representing a school must obtain a permit from the Commissioner and must also place a bond.

PRIVATE CAREER SCHOOLS: A NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Private career schools are private, independent, and usually for-profit postsecondary institutions, often called proprietary schools. Unlike larger public institutions, private career schools have a narrow, well-focused mission: to train their students for entry-level positions in a limited number of occupations in as short a period of time as possible, while making a profit for the school's owner. These two factors--narrow mission and profit incentive--influence the schools' practices and determine the types of students who choose a private career school. The schools range from small store-front operations offering single programs to large schools owned by major public corporations.

Private career schools have deep roots in American history. A proprietor in Plymouth, Massachusetts, who offered to teach the casting of accounts in 1622, may have owned America's first private career school. Throughout the 19th Century and most of the 20th Century the private career schools, then called proprietary schools, grew with the national economy. The schools were almost exclusively market-driven institutions that were dependent on private tuition payments. Moreover, they were far removed from traditional higher education institutions, and received scant attention from the public.

The Higher Education Amendments of 1972 dramatically changed the role of private career schools in higher education. The amendments made private career school students eligible for federal student aid (if they attended a school accredited by a nationally recognized body) and mandated that private career schools be included on state "1202 Commissions" that were set up to coordinate higher education within each state. While these amendments did not completely bring private career schools into the mainstream, they did draw the public's attention to the sector.

In recent years the explosive growth of private career schools and the increasing use of federal student aid by students in that sector have led to increased scrutiny of the industry from policymakers, the media, and the public at large. In the early 1980's , as national attention turned to the problem of guaranteed student loan defaults, the private career schools became the focus of media attention. As more attention turned to the private career school industry it became clear that objective information about the practices, performance and quality of private career schools was extremely limited.

Size of the Private Career School Sector

No one knows for certain how many private career schools are operating in the United States. In the most recent attempt to make a comprehensive count, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (1987) reported that, excluding correspondence schools, there were 5,509 private career schools serving over a million students in 1982, and that only about 46% of these institutions were accredited. More recent data (Moore, 1990) estimates that there are approximately 4,000 schools accredited by the three largest accrediting groups serving approximately 1,500,000 students annually.

Student Characteristics

Research on students in private career schools shows that, when compared with students in traditional higher education institutions, they are more likely to be low income, female, minority, and a high school dropout (Sango-Jordon, 1989).

Regulation of Private Career Schools

Private career schools are regulated by a triad of agencies. At the national level, accredited private career schools must conform to standards of their accrediting association. The accrediting association enforces the standards through reviews, which include on-site visits once every five or six years. Next, accredited schools must comply with federal regulations related to federal student aid. The state makes up the third part of the triad. State regulation varies substantially. Since states are principally charged with protecting consumers, they are the body most often concerned with regulating the school's advertising practices, refund policies and safety of facilities.

School Practices And Quality Assessment

Research on quality assessment is largely limited to traditional two-year and four-year degree granting institutions. In fact, this project represents the first state-wide quality assessment project for private career schools even though quality assessment has become a concern in the private career sector. For example, the Association of Independent Colleges and Schools (AICS) recently published Quality Assurance for Private Career Schools (Harris, Hillenmeyer and Foran, 1989) to help schools develop quality assessment programs.

Private career schools differ from traditional higher education institutions in their mission, governance and instructional methods. To assess the quality of private career schools these differences must be taken into account.

First, private career schools exist to provide short-term training that leads directly to employment. This narrow mission makes measuring quality outcomes relatively straight-forward by looking at graduation rates, placement rates and graduate earnings.

Second, private career schools tend to be small, highly decentralized, and not part of a comprehensive state-wide system, such as the community colleges or technical schools. The small size of the schools means that they have limited in-house resources for research, and the autonomy of the individual schools makes sector-wide research difficult. This study relies on voluntary cooperation, uniform methods across all institutions, and an independent third-party evaluator to overcome these barriers.

Third, because students come to private career schools for training that will lead immediately to a job the primary teaching mode is self-paced, "hands on learning," where students work on equipment using the same methods found in the work place. Because equipment and computers play and important role in the instructional program, this project made a special effort to evaluate the quality of the schools' equipment. The study also had students evaluate the relevance of instruction to their ultimate career goals.

It must also be said that private career schools are mostly private for-profit institutions that must make a profit to survive. The profit motive is perhaps the characteristic that most separates private career schools from the traditional sector. These schools must compete with low-cost or free public programs offering similar programs. Other research (Wilms, 1987) has shown that private career schools operate on narrow profit margins and that the loss of a few students can make the difference between a profit or a loss. Because of this, private career schools differentiate themselves from public institutions by tailoring their programs to fit the needs of a limited market of students. Schools provide flexible scheduling, individual attention, and short programs to attract and retain students. Other research (Moore & Smith 1988, 1989) has shown that schools driven by the profit motive respond quickly to changes in student demand for programs and employer demand for graduates.

Because the mission and instructional methods of private career schools are different from traditional higher education institutions, many in the public have difficulty understanding the schools. Since private career schools are independent and not part of a comprehensive state system, data on the schools beyond enrollments and program offerings are limited. Thus, policymakers often lack the objective information they need to understand the private career school sector and to include the sector in state-wide planning.

METHOD

Rationale for Approach

In their review of quality assessment in higher education, Rossman and El-Khawas (1987) note that student evaluations can provide valuable insights into an institution's strengths and weaknesses. An additional advantage of using student evaluations in this case study was that the low cost of administering these instruments allowed the project to include 24 of 26 schools who were members of the Minnesota Association of Private Postsecondary Schools (MAPPS) and willing to participate in the study, and thus generate a comprehensive evaluation of the entire sector.

Sample

There are 26 MAPPS' schools serving over 10,000 students annually; 24 of the schools participated in the project. MAPPS' schools represent approximately 70% of the accredited private career school enrollment in Minnesota, so this study represents a large majority of the state's private career schools and students. While no data were collected on non-participating schools, a review of school names shows that a large proportion of the non-MAPPS' schools were cosmetology schools and a number of others were test preparation schools.

All MAPPS' schools are accredited by at least one of the major national accrediting bodies that accredit private career schools, including: the National Association of Trade and Technical Schools (NATTS), which are principally trade and technical schools; the Association of Independent Colleges and Schools (AICS), which are principally business schools; and the National Accrediting Commission of Cosmetology Arts and Sciences (NACCAS). Table 1 indicates the accreditation of schools participating in the project.

Table 1
Schools and Students In Study, By Type of Accreditation

	Type of School			
	AICS	NATTS	NACCAS	Overall
Number of Schools	9	9	6	24
Percent	37.5%	37.5%	25%	100%
Number of Students	1,561	2,557	370	4,488
Percent	35%	57%	8%	100%

Instrument Development

In conjunction with MAPPS, the study team developed a questionnaire designed to be administered in-school. The questionnaire gathered demographic data on students at each school, information on how they came to choose the school and program, and students' assessment of the quality of the training and services they received, including: admission services, financial aid services, instructional program, equipment and facilities, and job placement services.

Data Collection

The questionnaire was administered by school-level staff in each participating school during January and February of 1990, using step-by-step procedures prescribed by the study team. The questionnaire took approximately 30 minutes to complete. The instructions used for administration are included in Appendix A.

To protect student confidentiality, each student sealed his or her questionnaire in a plain envelope provided with the questionnaire. The schools collected the envelopes and returned them in a group for processing.

Once the questionnaires were returned, project staff inspected each

school's package to ensure that there had been no tampering with students' sealed envelopes. In addition, questionnaires were visually inspected to ensure they had been completed and had not been altered in any way.

Student responses were key-entered onto computer tape. The data were edited through a series of computerized checks, whereby every school's responses were checked for excessive missing data, out-of-range values and other problems.

Analysis

The edited data base was analyzed using the SAS statistical package on the mainframe computer at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). The frequencies, descriptive statistics were used to describe the students overall responses. Cross-tabulations and chi-square analysis, was used to compare the three types of schools. An overall satisfaction index score was computed for each student and ANOVAs were employed to identify relationships between student characteristics and satisfaction.

Finally, limited comparisons were made between private career school students and students in Minnesota technical institutes and community colleges.

RESULTS

CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDENTS

Profile

While private career schools served a wide range of students, the typical Minnesota private career school student was a 24-year-old, single, white woman, high school graduate, with a low income. This student worked 29 hours a week while attending school full-time, and received financial aid from several federal and state programs.

The typical Minnesota private career school student was more educated and affluent than private career school students nation-wide. Minnesota students were also less likely to be minority, or to have received federal student aid than similar students nationally.

Demographics

A majority (57%) of private career school students were women. Unlike private career school students nation-wide most Minnesota students were white (89%); the remaining students were minority, and distributed among Blacks (5%), Asians (3%), Hispanics (2%) and Indians (<1%). (See Table 2.)

Most private career school students were beyond the typical college-going age. Although the average age of students was 24.5 years (Table 2), the schools served a wide range of age groups, including 16% who were over 30 years old, and over a third who were 20 years of age or younger.

While most students were single, 20% were married and over a quarter of the students had children under 18, indicating that there were a large number of students who juggled both home and school responsibilities.

Ninety-eight percent of the students had completed high school, and over 40% had some experience with higher education before enrolling in a private career school. Interestingly, 10% of the students had already completed an associate degree and 5% a bachelors degree before turning to a private career school for training. At the other end of the spectrum two percent of the students had not completed high school.

These students are known as "ability-to-benefit" students, meaning they don't have a high school diploma and must prove that they have the "ability to benefit from instruction" before they are eligible for federal student aid. The proportion of "ability-to-benefit" students in this study was far below the national estimate of 10% for all private career schools (Sango-Jordon 1989).

Reflecting the overall demographics Minnesota over 96% of the students were U.S. citizens and 93% reported English was their native language. Again, it appears that Minnesota schools enrolled far fewer immigrants than private career schools nation-wide. For example, a study of private career schools in New York (Smith and Moore, 1988) found that 16% of the private career school students were not U.S. citizens.

This analysis shows that AICS, NATTS, and NACCAS served distinctly different types of students. The typical AICS student was an older, female student, who attended another institution before enrolling and was independent for financial aid purposes. The typical NATTS students was a male, who attended another institution before enrolling and was independent for financial aid purposes. The typical NACCAS student was a younger female, who has not attended another institution and who was dependent for financial aid purposes.

Income and Employment

The majority of students came from low-income households, with a significant proportion coming from very low-income households. In this project, student income was measured two ways: students reported their personal income and their family income for the previous year. The results revealed the majority of students came from families earning less than $20,000 a year (Table 2). Almost a quarter came from families earning less than $7,500 a year. Balancing the low-income students were about of a quarter of the students at the other end of the scale who reported family incomes over $35,000.

Personal incomes, as expected, were substantially lower. Almost 40% of the students reported personal incomes below $4,000 a year and 70% below $8,000. Only 6% of the students reported earning more than $20,000.

Despite the low incomes reported, over three-quarters of the students were working their way through school. The average number of hours worked a week while attending school was 29 hours. This indicated that many students carried heavy work schedules in addition to full-time school attendance.

NACCAS students were least affluent of the three groups. When asked to indicate their annual personal income, almost 80% of NACCAS students said they were making less than $4,000 yearly, compared to fewer than 40% of AICS and

NATTS students in this income bracket. While almost a third of all AICS and NATTS students reported making more than $8,000 annually, fewer than 7% of NACCAS students reported making this much yearly.

Despite relatively low incomes among the state's career students, we saw earlier that three-fourths of the students worked while attending school. Of this percentage, more AICS and NATTS students held a job and went to school than did NACCAS students. In addition, working AICS and NATTS students were on the job more hours per week than are NACCAS students--about 30 hours vs. 21 hours.

Table 2
Demographic Characteristics,
By Type of School
(Percent of Students)

	Type of School				
Variable	AICS	NATTS	NACCAS	Overall	Chi-sq. Sig.
Gender					.000
Male	19%	63%	8%	43%	
Female	81	37	92	57	
Ethnicity					
White	91	87	92	89%	.090
Black	5	5	4	5	
Hispanic	1	1	1	2	
Asian	2	4	2	3	
Indian	<1	1	<1	<1	
Children					.000
Yes	31	25	16	27	
Married	24	20	13	21	.000
Education					.000
Some H.S.	2	3	3	2	
H.S. graduate	55	53	72	55	
Some college	27	30	17	28	
Assoc. degree	11	10	7	10	
Bachelors or more	5	4	1	5	

Table 2 (Cont.)
Demographic Characteristics,
By Type of School
(Percent of Students)

Variable	Type of School AICS	NATTS	NACCAS	Overall	Chi-sq. Sig.
Personal Income					.000
<$4,000	39	33	77	39	
$4001-8,000	29	33	17	30	
$8,001-12,000	14	15	4	13	
$12,001-16,000	7	7	1	7	
$16,001-19,999	5	5	>1	5	
$20,000+	6	7	>1	6	
Family Income					.102
<$7,500	22	24	25	23	
$7,500-10,000	9	9	7	9	
$10,001-15,000	12	12	9	11	
$15,001-20,000	11	11	9	11	
$20,000-35,000	23	21	21	22	
$35,000+	23	29	29	24	
Work while attending	76	79	53	76	.000
Number of hours worked	29 hrs.	31 hrs.	21 hrs.	29 hrs.	
Average Age	24.8 yrs.	24.7 yrs.	21.5 yrs.	24.5 yrs.	

Financial Aid

Two-thirds of the students were "independent" for financial aid purposes (Table 3), meaning they did not rely on their parents for financial support. The remaining third were "dependent."

The monetary means students used to finance their training were

divided into three categories: government student aid, personal resources, and other resources.

The most common source of finance was government aid. Over half the students reported receiving some form of federal guaranteed student loan and about 40% received a federal Pell Grant. These results were substantially below the national figures which show that 70% of private career school students receive a federal loan and 56% a federal grant (U.S. Department of Education, 1987). Slightly over one-third of the students received a Minnesota State Scholarship and Grant Program grant. Small groups of students received funds from the Veterans Administration, Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies or the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Only 30% reported that they were paying for their training with savings. Interestingly, only 28% of the students said they were paying for training with earnings despite the fact that so many were working. This may be because students used their earnings to pay living expenses and they paid tuition with other forms of financing such as loans or grants. Only 22% of the student reported that they received money from their families to pay for school.

Over 20% of the student borrowed from other sources to pay for their training. A small proportion of students received employer reimbursement for their training, got public assistance, or were part of a federal Job Training Partnership Act Program.

Overall, 67% of the state's career school students were classified as "independent" for financial aid purposes. However, a breakdown of this result shows that less than half (43%) of NACCAS students were in this classification, with the majority being classified as "dependent".

When asked to indicate all the ways they were financing their training, a higher percentage of AICS students reported they took out GSLs and got state grants than NATTS and NACCAS students. Since fewer NACCAS students worked while going to school, fewer NACCAS students were financing their training through earnings and more were relying on family money.

Table 3
Financial Aid
By Type of School
(Percent of Students)

Variable	Type of School AICS	NATTS	NACCAS	Overall	Chi-sq. Sig.
Status					.000
Dependent	33%	30%	57%	33%	
Independent	67	70	43	67	
Type of Financial Resource					
Government Aid					
GSL	63	54	58	58	.000
Pell	42	41	39	41	.515
State grant	38	32	29	34	.000
Voc. Rehab.	2	3	1	3	.046
Veteran benefits	1	4	2	3	.000
BIA	<1	<1	<1	<1	.562
Personal					
Savings	29	31	31	30	.505
Earning while attending	28	30	18	28	.000
Family $	23	19	41	22	.000
Other Sources					
Other Loan	24	22	17	22	.029
Employer reimbursement	4	4	>1	3	.001
Public Asst.	3	3	2	3	.097
JTPA	3	3	<1	2	.054

COMPARISON WITH MINNESOTA TECHNICAL INSTITUTE AND COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS

To better understand how private career schools fit into the Minnesota higher education system, the characteristics of students in technical institutes and community colleges were compared with private career school students. Unfortunately, there were only two variables (gender and ethnicity) on which comparable data were available for all three systems (see Table 4).

The data showed that private career schools enrolled a smaller proportion of women than community colleges, but a larger proportion than technical institutes. Like private career schools nationwide, Minnesota schools enrolled a larger proportion of minorities than similar public institutions; for example, only 4% of the community college students and 7% of the technical college students were minority compared to 11% of the private career school students see Table 3 on next page.)

Table 4
Demographic Comparison of Private Career School,
Technical College, and Community College Students
(Percent of Students)

	Sector		
Variable	Private Career	Tech. College*	Comm. College**
Gender			
Male	43%	55%	39%
Female	57	45	61
Ethnicity			
White	89%	93%	96%
Black	5	2	2
Hispanic	2	1	>1
Asian	3	2	>1
Indian	1	2	1

*"Minority Enrollment Report," Minnesota Technical College System, June 5. 1990.

**Minnesota Community Colleges: 1988-89 Fact Book, Office of Planning and Research, Minnesota State Board for Community Colleges, July 1989.

WHY STUDENTS CHOOSE PRIVATE CAREER SCHOOLS

In discussions of private career schools the question is always raised: Why do so many students choose a private career school, which charges substantial tuition, when similar low-cost or free public programs are available? The answer probably lies in the individual's previous experience with postsecondary education and his or her career goals.

Profile

The typical private career school student in Minnesota attended another postsecondary institution, usually a public four-year institution, before enrolling in a private career school. She attended one year or less, and left because she changed her career goal. She was seeking additional training because she was dissatisfied with her current job and chose a particular private career school because of its reputation for job placement, and to a lesser degree because the school offered small classes and a short program that would get her employed quickly. She chose a particular program because of an interest in the field, and enrolled full-time.

Previous Education

For many students, private career schools provide a second chance at postsecondary education after trying a more traditional higher education institution.

In Minnesota, slightly over half the students reported that they attended another postsecondary institution before enrolling (Table 5). As Table 18 shows, surprisingly 39% of the students had enrolled in a public four-year institution, and an additional 9% had enrolled in a four-year private institution, indicating that almost half of these students had some experience with a four-year college before selecting a private career school. One-third of the students had enrolled in a community college and 29% in a public vocational program. Interestingly, only 11% had attended another private vocational school.

Most students did not remain enrolled long at their first institution, with 57% of the students reporting that they had completed one year or less. Principally, students left their previous institution because they changed their career goal, or because they graduated. Smaller groups of students reported they left because of a personal obligation, because they needed to work full-time, or they couldn't afford the cost. Only 6% said they left because the quality of education was poor.

Over half the NATTS and AICS students attended another postsecondary institution before enrolling, compared to only about a third of NACCAS students. Of the students who attended another institution about 40% of both AICS and NATTS students attended a public four-year college before enrolling compared to about a quarter of NACCAS students. There were no significant differences in the proportion of students who attended other types of institutions.

Table 5
Previous Experience with Higher Education
By Type of School
(Percent of Students)

Variable	Type of School AICS	NATTS	NACCAS	Overall	Chi-sq. Sig.
Attend other postsecondary	55%	57%	35%	54%	.000
Type of institution					
Private Vocational	10	11	13	11	.634
Public Voc-Tech	28	30	28	29	.735
Comm. College	31	35	33	33	.215
4-year Public	41	38	26	38	.005
4-year Private	8	9	11	9	.659
Reason for leaving					
Graduated	19	19	11	18	.001
Could Not Afford	5	6	3	5	.014
Personal commitments	7	8	3	7	.002
Need full-time job	6	7	2	6	.003
Changed career goal	18	19	19	18	.543
Quality of education poor	5	7	4	6	.019

Reason for Seeking Training

Dissatisfaction with their current job was the most common reason (40%) students gave for seeking more training (Table 6). A quarter of the students reported they had just graduated from high school and needed training for their first job. Only 11% said they were seeking training because they were dissatisfied with another institution, indicating that although most students have been to another institution, they tried their luck in the labor market before enrolling in a private career school.

Smaller groups of students had other reasons to seek training: they needed new skills to advance on their current job, they were unemployed, they finished raising a family and wanted to return to work, they were recently discharged from the military, or because they needed to change careers due to a personal injury.

The most common reason AICS and NATTS students were seeking training was that they were dissatisfied with their current job, compared to NACCAS students where almost half had just completed high school and needed training for their first job. There were only a few other differences, namely, AICS students were much more likely to say that they needed training because they were returning to work after having raised a family, and NATTS students were more likely to say that they were recently discharged from the military and needed training.

Table 6
Reason For Seeking Training,
By Type of School
(Percent of Students)

Variable	Type of School AICS	NATTS	NACCAS	Overall	Chi-sq. Sig.
Reason					.000
Dissatisfied with current job	41%	42%	29%	40%	
Just complete H.S.	26	21	46	25	
Dissatisfied with other school	10	11	11	11	
Needed more skills to advance in current job	8	8	6	8	
Unemployed	5	7	4	6	
Returning to work after children	8	3	4	5	
Discharged from military	>1	4	>1	2	
Retrain after injury	2	3	0	2	

Reasons for Selecting a School and Program

Students did not "shop" among schools extensively. Only a little more than a third of the students reported that they visited another institution before enrolling (Table 7). Most frequently they visited public vocational/technical schools and private vocational schools. About a quarter of the students reported they visited a public-four year institution or a community college.

NATTS and NACCAS students were more likely to have visited other schools then AICS students, and NATTS students were more likely to have visited

public technical institutes than any other students.

Examining the reasons why students did not select a different type of school revealed interesting information about the preferences of private career school students. Principally, students rejected other types of institutions because they thought the quality of programs offered was poor, the program was too long, or the institution did not offer a program in a field of interest.

These reasons illustrated again the sharp focus of students' career goals. Students generally had a clear idea of the field they wished to enter and wanted a short program that would get them out into the workforce quickly. Also, while only about a third of the students visited other institutions, those who did seemed very concerned about quality and were quick to reject an institution if they considered the quality poor.

The two primary reasons why the students who visited a public vocational/technical school did not choose that school were the poor quality of programs and that the school did not offer a program of interest. In the case of students who visited other private vocational schools, the primary reasons for not selecting them were the poor quality of programs and the fact that it was too far to travel to the school site. Students who visited but did not select a four-year public college or university did so primarily because the program was too long or the classes too large. The primary reasons for not selecting a community college were that it offered no program of interest or had poor quality programs. The primary reasons for not selecting a private four-year college were that they did not offer a program of interest, the program was too long, or the student could not meet the admissions requirements.

The primary reason students chose a particular school was because of its reputation for job placement (35%). This indicated the keen career focus of private career school students and the importance given to an individual school's reputation for being able to place students immediately into jobs related to training. An additional 11% chose a school because of a friend's recommendation, again emphasizing the importance of a school's reputation to its success.

Small classes, a short program and "classes that started when I was ready," were other reasons given by at least 10% of the students, indicating the importance students put on finding an institution that met their individual needs and life situations.

Reasons that appeared to be much less important were: the school's location, the availability of financial aid, modern equipment, appearance of the school, likable school personnel, and easy access by public transportation. While these factors contributed to students choosing a school, they did not appear to be

decisive.

While reputation for job placement was the most common reason given for choosing a particular school by students in all three types of schools, NATTS and NACCAS students were much more likely to give that reason than AICS students. Conversely, AICS students were more likely than other students to say they chose a school because it offered small classes, a short program and a convenient location. NACCAS students were most likely to say they chose the school because of a friend's recommendation or the school's appearance.

The majority of students reported they chose a particular program because they were interested in the field. Smaller groups of students reported that they chose a program because it offered good opportunities for advancement or good pay. Only 6% of the students reported that they were already in the field and needed more training to advance. An equal number reported they chose the program because it offered good job security and only 3% of the students chose a program because it was easy to get a job. The large majority (82%), enrolled in a full-time program, meaning that in most private career schools, they were in school 30 hours a week.

In all three types of schools, "interest in the field" was the most common reason given for choosing a particular program. AICS students were far more likely than other students to report that they chose the program because "jobs in the field paid well." NACCAS students reported that they chose the field because it was "easy to find a job."

NACCAS students were most likely to enroll full-time (92%) and AICS students were least likely (75%).

Table 7
Significant Differences In Student Choice,
By Type of School
(Percent of Students)

Variable	Type of School AICS	NATTS	NACCAS	Overall	Chi-sq. Sig.
Visit other school before enrolling	32	40	41	37	.001
Most important reason for choosing school					.000
Reputation for job placement	26	39	42	35	
Small classes	17	10	4	12	
Recommendation	8	12	16	11	
Short program	14	11	4	11	
Classes started when student ready	11	10	7	10	
Convenient location		13	4	9	7
Financial aid available	5	3	4	4	
School appearance	2	3	10	3	
Modern equipment	1	5	1	3	
Likeable personnel	2	1	2	2	
Tuition affordable	1	2	>1	1	
Easy access, public	1	>1	>1	1	
Reason for choosing program					.000
Interest in field	45%	62%	82%	58%	
Opportunities to advance	16	15	9	15	
Good pay in field	21	7	1	11	
Need training	7	6	2	6	
Job security	7	6	2	6	
Easy to get a job	4	3	9	3	
Enrollment Status					.000
Full-time	75%	86%	92%	82%	
Part-time	25	14	8	18	

Program Choice

Minnesota private career schools offered a wide array of highly specialized programs. The most popular programs were those that trained people for technologically sophisticated service occupations.

Among the most popular trade and technical programs were electronics technology and advertising design. Accounting, court reporting and business administration were the most popular business programs. Programs that prepared students to become licensed cosmetologists were the most popular cosmetology programs. Medical assisting was the most popular program in the health field. Enrollments by program are included in appendix A.

STUDENTS' ASSESSMENT OF QUALITY

A simple way to assess the quality of a school is to ask students if they would recommend the school to a friend. If the student says "yes," it is safe to say that the student is satisfied with their overall school experience with the school. Overwhelmingly, Minnesota private career school students were satisfied with their school, as 89% reported that they would recommend their school to a friend (Table 9). While all types of schools generally had high levels of satisfaction, Table 10 shows that NACCAS levels were routinely higher than those of NATTS or AICS schools.

Table 9
Would Recommend Their School To A Friend,
By Type of School
(Percent of Students)

Type of School				Chi-sq.
AICS	NATTS	NACCAS	Overall	Sig.
85%	90%	94%	89%	.000

To provide a more sophisticated assessment of a school's quality we asked each student to rate the quality of 19 features of the school on a four point scale, with 4 being excellent, 3 good, 2 fair and 1 poor. We assumed that if a student rated an item good or excellent then he or she was satisfied with that feature of the school. Thus, by adding the percent of students who said "good" and the percent who said "excellent" we calculated a satisfaction score for that feature of the school. (A rule of thumb developed in other quality assessments in private career schools is that if 70% of the students are satisfied with a feature then the quality is good. Features where less than 70% of the students are satisfied can be considered problem areas.)

The features rated can be grouped into four areas: admissions, program/course of study, school facilities, and job placement assistance. The graphs that follow show the percent of students who were satisfied with their school's features in each of these four areas.

Admissions

Students' ratings of admissions generally indicated the degree to which they thought the school was accurately portrayed to them in visits, interviews and publications. In this assessment students were asked to rate both the accuracy and completeness of information they were given in the interview and the catalog. In all cases over 70% of the students were satisfied (Table 33).

Satisfaction with financial aid services was slightly below the 70% mark (Table 10). The financial aid process, which involves complex paperwork to satisfy federal and state agencies, is often frustrating and students are sometimes discontent with the size of their awards. The rating here indicated that about one-third of the students did not find the financial aid service they received adequate.

Table 10
Student Satisfaction With Admissions,
By Type of School
(Percent of Students)

Variable	Type of School AICS	NATTS	NACCAS	Overall	Chi-Sq Sig
Completeness of interview	73%	79%	85%	77%	.000
Accuracy of interview	69	77	82	74	.000
Completeness of catalog	79	78	84	78	.000
Accuracy of catalog	77	79	81	78	.000
Financial aid service	66	66	77	67	.000

Program/ Course of Study

This is the most critical area for quality assessment. Here we asked students to rate the quality of training they received. Minnesota students gave their programs exceptionally high ratings. With one exception--orientation--over 80% of the students were satisfied with the different aspects of their program (Table 11).

Students reported high satisfaction with the heart of the training they received: 87% were satisfied with the quality of teaching, and 83% with the instructional materials. The schedule of classes and pace of course work, important elements to students who must juggle family and work responsibilities while attending school, received equally high ratings.

In general, private career school students are focused on careers, so the relevance of course work to their future career goals is important to them. In this study, an overwhelming 88% of the students were satisfied with relevance of the training they received.

Finally, students were asked to rate the quality of their fellow students. This feature gives a general indicator of how satisfied and comfortable students were in the general social environment in the school. Interestingly, this feature

received the highest rating, 91%, indicating that almost all students found the school environment a good match for them.

Orientation, where students rated the preliminary activities and information the school offered, received the lowest rating (78% satisfied), but it was still substantially above the 70% threshold.

In this area scores were clustered together more closely (Table 11), and NACCAS scores were not uniformly higher. One difference that did emerge was that NATTS students seemed substantially more satisfied with the scheduling of classes than NACCAS or AICS students.

Table 11
Student Satisfaction With Program/Course of Study,
By Type of School
(Percent Excellent or Good)

	Type of School				
Variable	AICS	NATTS	NACCAS	Overall	Chi-Sq Sig
Orientation	75%	79%	89%	78%	.000
Quality of teaching	86	88	91	87	.000
Instructional materials	83	82	87	83	.000
Scheduling of classes	75	85	79	81	.000
Fellow students	91	91	89	91	.164
Pace of course work	81	82	86	82	.000
Relevance of course work	88	87	91	88	.000

School Facilities

Students were asked to rate the quality of the overall school facility and then to rate three features of the facilities that deal directly with training. For any private career schools the quality of equipment and instructional

labs is a key indicator of school quality because of the emphasis on "hands-on" learning using the same equipment found in the workplace.

Over three-quarters of the students in this study were satisfied with the overall facility (Table 12). Ratings of instructional equipment (81%), instructional labs (80%) and computer equipment were somewhat higher. These results indicated that students perceived that they were trained on up-to-date equipment in their field of study, which was both available and in good repair.

In this area there was more variation in scores. NACCAS students seemed much more satisfied with the overall quality of facilities, instructional equipment and instructional labs than students in other types of schools. NATTS students tended to be somewhat less satisfied with instructional equipment, and AICS students less satisfied with instructional labs.

Table 12
Student Satisfaction With Facilities,
By Type of School
(Percent Excellent or Good)

	Type of School				
Variable	AICS	NATTS	NACCAS	Overall	Chi-Sq Sig
Quality of facility	72%	79%	86%	77%	.000
Instructional equipment	80	77	85	81	.000
Instructional labs	76	81	87	80	.000
Computer equipment	80	76	75	79	.000

Job Placement Assistance

A school's reputation for job placement is a key reason why students choose a particular private career school. Career school students have a clear career goal and want to move quickly though training and into the job market. The quality of job placement assistance is key to achieving their goal.

In Minnesota, eighty-seven percent of the students reported that they planned to use the school's job placement services, but only 20% had actually had contact with the placement office. This low level of contact was probably due to

the fact that most students would not contact the placement service until they approached the end of their program.

Students rated three elements of job placement assistance: job search preparation, which included training on how to interview, and how to write a resume and locate jobs; placement counseling, in which the school's placement counselor worked with individuals students to plan a job search; and finally, the quality of job contacts that were available through the school.

All three areas received satisfaction scores over the 70% threshold (Table 12). The highest rating went to the quality of job search preparation (78% satisfied), followed by placement counseling, 73%. Seventy-one percent were satisfied with the quality of job contacts, indicating that this was the area within placement where student expectations were least likely to be met.

Scores here clustered tightly together with only very small differences among the schools types of schools (Table 13). Note, again, that students gave a relatively low satisfaction rating to the quality of job contacts available in the schools.

Table 13
Student Satisfaction With Job Placement,
By Type of School
(Percent Excellent or Good)

	Type of School				
Variable	AICS	NATTS	NACCAS	Overall	Chi-Sq Sig
Job search preparation	77%	78%	78%	78%	.008
Placement counseling	72	75	71	73	.042
Job contacts	69	71	72	71	.000

CHARACTERISTICS ASSOCIATED WITH STUDENT SATISFACTION

APPROACH

Objective

First hand experience with students suggested that there might be a better fit between some types of students and private career schools than others. The objective of this analysis was to determine which student characteristics were associated with satisfaction, and thus determine which types of students seemed to be a better a fit. The characteristics examined included student demographics, previous experience with post-secondary education, and reasons for selecting a particular school and program.

Satisfaction Measure

The student satisfaction measure was based on the four point scale described earlier. Satisfaction with the different components of the school, admission, facilities, instruction, and placement were found to be highly intercorrelated. We concluded that this scale could be used to create an overall satisfaction score. Using the scores of one to four on each of the items we created a total score for each student and then normalized it to a 100 point scale. The overall average score on the scale was 68.5.

Analysis

Analysis of variance was used to determine if there was a statistically significant relationship between the various student characteristics and student satisfaction. An analysis (see Table 14) Found there were significant differences between the average satisfaction scores of students enrolled in NATTS, AICS and NACCAS schools. We also knew there were systematic differences between the programs offered by the three types of schools and the students who chose them we analyzed each variable separately for each type of school.

Table 14
Average Student Satisfaction
By Type of School

Variable	Type of School AICS	NATTS	NACCAS	Overall	F Value Sig. of F
Average Satisfaction	66.8	68.5	74.0	68.4	29.45 (.000)

RESULTS

Table 15 show the variables that were significantly associated (at the .01 level) with student satisfaction for each type of school.

Surprisingly few variables were significantly associated with satisfaction and only one variable Reason for Choosing school was significant across all three school types.

Reason for seeking training combines students motivation for seeking training with their life situation when they enroll. It was only significant in the case of NATTS students.

The results show that students who were seeking training because they "needed to make a career change due personal injury", " were unemployed and needed training to find a job", "were dissatisfied with another school" or "were returning to the workforce after raising a family" had average satisfactions scores above the mean.

Conversely students who were seeking training because "were dissatisfied with their current job", "just graduated from high school", "discharged from the military and need more training", or "need more skills to advance on the job" had below average satisfaction scores.

AICS student who had attended another school were significantly less satisfied than those who did not. Given that many of these students had attended a four year institution these data may indicate that these student bring a different set of expectations that are not being met to their private career school. A related variable level of education reinforced this finding. As the level of

education increased satisfaction declined. For example the average satisfaction score for students with some high school was 72.6, while the score for student with bachelors degree was 60.6.

Reason for choosing school was the only variable significant across all types of schools. An examination of this variable indicates that students who say they chose the school for some reason related to its quality such as "reputation for job placement" or "modern equipment" are uniformly more satisfied than students who choose the school for some convenience factor such as "convenient location" or "classes started when I was ready".

The ethnicity was significant in both AICS and NATTS schools, but the patterns were different. In AICS schools white students were more satisfied then average while Hispanic, Black and Asian students were less satisfied. In NATTS schools that pattern reversed and white students were less satisfied than Black or Hispanic students, and Asian students were less satisfied than any other group.

In NATTS schools student who worked while attending were less satisfied than those who did not. It would appear that working students who are more pressed for time, and must juggle their schedule are more likely to be dissatisfied.

Personal income was significantly associated for both NATTS and NACCAS students, in both cases as income declined satisfaction increased. This may be related to the finding that working students are less satisfied, or may be that low income students have some over characteristics that make them a better match for private career schools.

Table 13
Characteristics Associated with Student Satisfaction
By Type of School
(F Value and Significance of F)

Variable	Type of School AICS	NATTS	NACCAS	Sig
Reason for seeking training	**	4.53 (.001)	**	
Attended other school	8.46 (.004)	**	**	
Reason for choosing school	5.84 (.000)	9.13 (.000)	7.17 (.000)	
Reason for choosing program	**	5.96 (.000)	**	
Ethnicity	4.59 (.000)	4.34 (.000)	** **	
Education	4.37 (.002)	**	**	
Working while attending	**	29.02 (.000)		
Personal income	**	5.39 (.000)	4.27 (.001)	

** F not significant at .01

The lack of significant findings in this analysis indicates that the source of students satisfaction or dissatisfaction may not be fit between the students characteristics and the school, but rather may simply be the quality of the school in which the student is enrolled.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

Our analysis indicates that private career schools provide alternative postsecondary education for non-traditional students who have specific career goals. Overall, students are highly satisfied with the training they receive. Eight specific conclusions emerge from the analysis:

1. **Students report high levels of satisfaction with their private career school.** The results of this assessment of private career school quality indicate that in the students' views Minnesota schools offer high quality programs that generally meet their expectations. Over 89% of the students report that they would recommend their school to a friend.

2. **Private career schools provide a second chance for students who first enroll in other more traditional institutions and then leave.** Fifty-seven percent of the students enrolled in another institution before enrolling in a private career school. Interestingly, 48% of students who attended another institution had enrolled in a four-year college or university. Fifteen percent of the students completed a bachelor or associate degree before turning to a private career school for specialized training.

3. **Students turn to private career schools to get out of a dead-end job or get trained for their first job.** Over 40% of the students were seeking training because they were dissatisfied with their current job, while 25% were seeking training for their first job.

4. **Private career school students have highly focused career goals, and choose a school because they believe it can help them meet their goals.** Students principally choose a private career school because of its reputation for job placement or because it is recommended by a friend. Students also find appealing the facts that programs are short, classes are small, and that they can begin when they are ready.

5. **Private career school students are older, disadvantaged women, who often must juggle family and work responsibilities with full-time enrollment.** The typical private career school student is a 24 year old, white woman with a low income. She is enrolled full-time, yet works an average of 29 hours a week to support herself. She has a one-in-four chance of having children under 18.

6. **There is some evidence that, like private career school students nationally, Minnesota students may be more disadvantaged than similar students in public institutions.** While comparable data are limited, available data shows that private career schools enroll a larger proportion of minorities than either community colleges or public technical colleges.

7. **AICS, NATTS and NACCAS schools serve distinctly different types of students.** AICS schools, which principally offer business programs, serve a higher proportion of older, female students with children. AICS students are also the most likely to have attended another postsecondary institution, particularly a traditional four-year institution. NATTS schools, which train in the trade and technical areas, serve a higher proportion of men, over half of whom have attended another postsecondary institution. Most NATTS and AICS students seek training because they are dissatisfied with their current job. NACCAS schools, which train in cosmetology, generally serve younger women who have just graduated from high school and who are less likely to have children. Most NACCAS students are seeking training for their first job. NACCAS students also work fewer hours while attending either AICS or NATTS students.

8. **Student satisfaction or dissatisfaction does not appear to be rooted in the match between student characteristics and the school.** The limited number of student characteristics that were significantly associated with student satisfaction indicate that the sources of student satisfaction do not lie with the match between the student and school. Rather it may simply be that student satisfaction is based on the quality of the students experience within any given school.

   It does appear that students who have had experience with traditional higher education are bit less likely to satisfied with their private career school experience, and that those student who choose a school for its perceived quality are more likely to be satisfied then those who choose it for its convenience.

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APPENDIX A:
ENROLLMENT BY PROGRAM

Enrollment By Program

Type of Program	% of Students
Trade and Technical Programs	
Advertising Design	5.9%
Associate of Science Degree	0.6
Aviation Maintenance Technician	0.0
Baker	0.0
Broadcasting	8.0
Coin-Operated Machine Repair	0.1
Commercial Art	0.0
Computer Service Technical	0.1
Drafting	6.0
Electronics Technology	17.6
Fashion Merchandising	0.2
Gunsmith	0.0
Information Systems Management	1.7
Micro Information Systems	0.5
Office Automated Systems	0.5
Radio/Television Repair	0.1
VCR/Consumer Products Technician	0.1
Computer Maintenance and Repair	0.9
Computer Operations	0.3
Computer Programming	3.1
Data Entry	0.0
Data Processor	0.9
Word Processing	0.8
Business Programs	
Accounting	8.0
Administrative Assistant	1.0
Business Administration	4.2
Business Teacher Education	0.0
Business (Other)	0.3
Court reporting	8.1
Executive Secretarial	0.2
General Office (w/ accounting)	0.1
Management	1.8
Fashion Merchandising	0.2
Hotel-Motel Manager	0.0

Legal Assistant/Paralegal	0.2
Legal Secretary	2.1
Medical Secretary	0.0
Office Assistant	0.1
Secretarial	1.2
Secretary/Transcriptionist	0.5
Shorthand Reporter	1.1
Travel & Tourism	2.6

Cosmetology Programs

Cosmetology	8.9
Hair Removal	0.1
Manicuring	0.3
Skin Care	0.5

Health Programs

Dental Assistant	1.3
Medical Assisting	3.7
Medical Lab Technician	1.8
Medical Office Assisting	0.5
Nursing Assisting	0.3
Veterinarian Assistant	3